

A Guide to Singapore's Colonial History Walking Trail at Fort Canning Park



Introduction

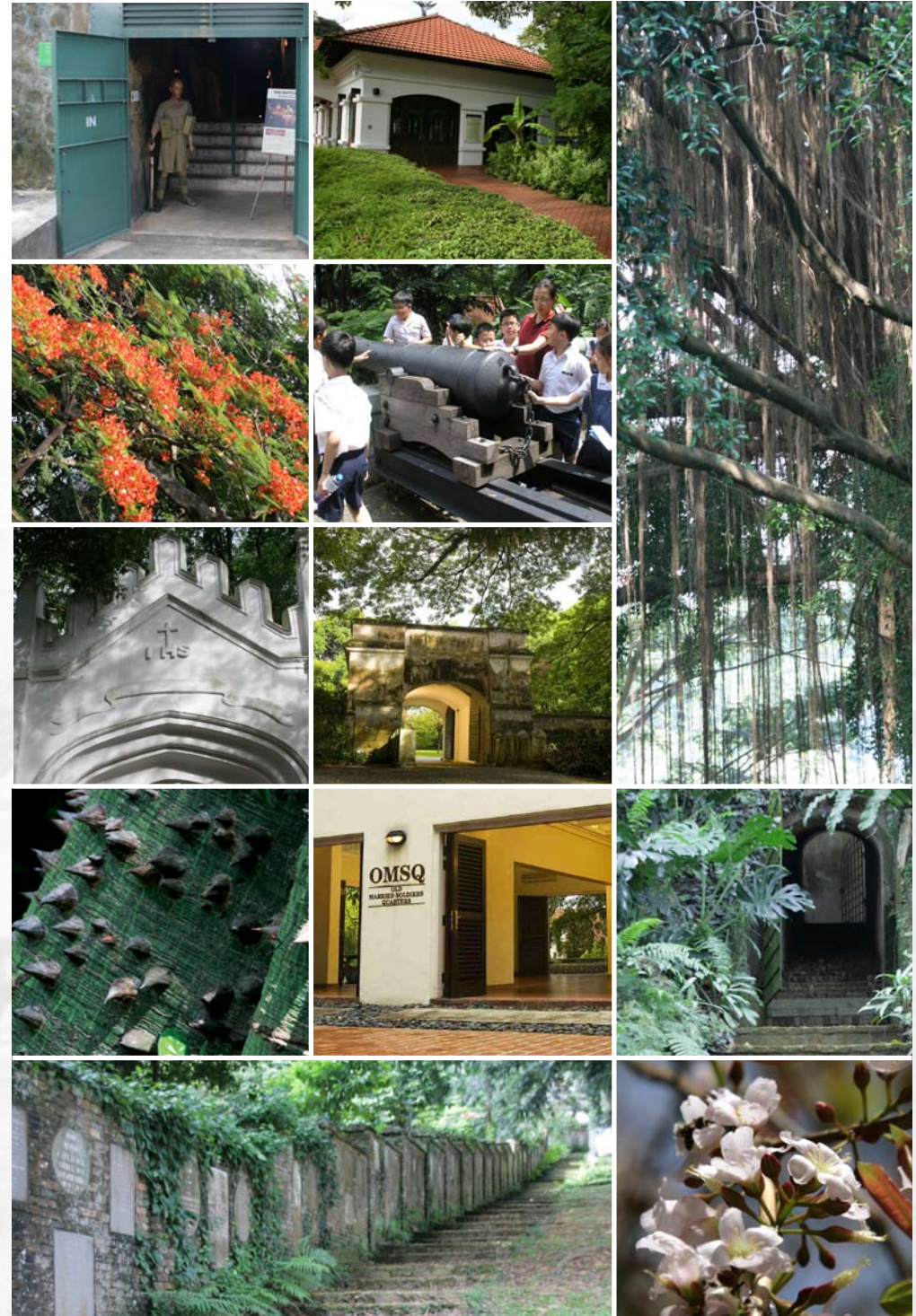
Fort Canning Hill is one of Singapore's most historic landmarks. It was very likely that in the 14th century, the royal palace of ancient Malay rulers stood on the summit of this once "Forbidden Hill". When the British arrived in 1819, they took advantage of the hill's resources in several ways. It was here that Sir Stamford Raffles built his bungalow, and was the place of residence for a long line of governors. The hill also became an important communication center, housing important communication devices such as the flagstaff, time ball, lighthouse and a telegraph office.

The hill was converted into a fort in 1860 and renamed Fort Canning in honour of Viscount Charles John Canning, Governor-General and first Viceroy of India. Around 1920s-1930s, the hill was transformed into an artillery fort with barracks, officers' quarters, old gunpowder magazine and a hospital. An underground bunker called the Battle Box was also constructed during the period.

Key historic events also took place on Fort Canning Hill. Most notably, Lt-General Percival's crucial decision to surrender to the Japanese was made in the Battle Box at Fort Canning Hill.

Enjoy the backdrop of majestic heritage and native trees, like the magnificent Broad-leafed Fig, Saga and Yellow Flame, as you embark on this trail. Look out for resident birds like Black-naped Orioles, Collared Kingfishers, Asian Koels and Yellow-vented Bulbuls that have made this park their home. You can also see butterflies, basking lizards and squirrels among the lush greenery.

Stroll back in time to Singapore's colonial days where soldiers and a fort on this hill stood guard over a bustling town of horses and carriages, carts and trishaws, and folk plying their wares at the harbour.



A Guide to Singapore's Colonial History Walking Trail at Fort Canning Park

Highlights

- Remnants and relics depicting Fort Canning's military history, including the Fort Wall, Fort Gate, Old Gunpowder Magazine, Sally Port and South Battery
- Raffles Terrace – the site of Raffles' first bungalow and replicas of old communication devices such as the Flagstaff, Time Ball and Lighthouse
- Spice Garden – the site of Singapore's first experimental and botanical garden
- Huge diversity of flora and fauna including Singapore's heritage and native trees
- Cupolas designed by Singapore's first architect
- Gothic Gates and Singapore's first Christian cemetery
- Stamford Green – 19th century gateway to Fort Canning Park

Legend

- Tarmac Road
- Track
- Staircase/Steps
- 14th Century Trail
- Escalator
- Building
- Car Park
- Information
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Restaurant
- Vending Machine
- UnderPass
- Shelter
- MRT Station
- Bus Stop
- Heritage Tree



A Guide to Singapore's Colonial History Walking Trail at Fort Canning Park



→ 1 Fort Canning Centre

Fort Canning Centre was originally constructed in 1926 as a British army barracks. Today, it has been restored to house the NParks Visitor Centre, function rooms and theatre facilities, a modern performing arts company and a professional culinary academy. The lawn in front of the building, Fort Canning Green, is a popular venue for concerts and music festivals.

→ 2 9-Pound Cannon and South Battery

This cannon dates back to the 19th century and had become obsolete before the fortification at Fort Canning was constructed. Most probably it was used at Scandal Point, an earlier fortification at the east end of the Padang. You can see a similar cannon standing 200m ahead, which is the area in which the main battery of guns was erected in the 19th century. The guns were mounted on carriages that could be pivoted to enable the guns to cover a wide arc of fire.

→ 3 Singapore's first experimental and botanical garden

On your left is the site of the first experimental and botanical garden in Singapore, established in 1822 by Sir Stamford Raffles.

At that time, spices were as valuable as gold among the English, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese. There was a fight for control over the sources and routes to the Spice Islands of Southeast Asia and India. In response to this fervor, the garden at Fort Canning was planted mainly with nutmeg, clove and other plants of economic value.

→ 4 Old Townscape

This photograph of Singapore was taken from this hill in the 1870s.

Stop for a moment and imagine yourself back in that era looking down at the bustling town below from where you are standing. Visualize a splendid view of horses and carriages going by, bullock carts and rickshaws pulled by weather-beaten pullers – all these set against the panoramic backdrop of the docking of vessels and folk plying their wares at the harbour.



→ 5 Heritage Tree – Ear-Pod tree (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*)

This tree is native to Central America.

Its ear-shaped pods contain a dry sugary pulp that is used as fodder feed. The bark and pods of the tree produce a substance called tannin, which can be used to make soap.

Scattered throughout the park are mature trees like this ear-pod tree. These trees have been given the Heritage Tree status under the Singapore's Heritage Tree Scheme, as part of efforts to promote the conservation of mature trees in Singapore.

→ 6 Government House and Fort Canning

Sir Stamford Raffles built the first official Government mansion near this spot in 1822. John Crawfurd and subsequent Residents later enlarged the house. When Fort Canning was built in 1860, this hill was transferred from civil to military ownership. The front yard of the mansion became the South Battery, which overlooked the town and harbour. The drawing shows the government house on top of the hill at Fort Canning.

→ 7 Bond Terrace

This terrace is named after Major-General Sir Lionel Vivian Bond (1884-1961). Between 1939 and 1941, he was the General Officer Commanding Malaya. He retired in 1941 and was replaced by Lt-General Percival.

A Guide to Singapore's Colonial History Walking Trail at Fort Canning Park



→ 8

The Signing of the Treaty in 1824

In 1824 the British resolved their disputes over territory with the Dutch. They also convinced the Sultan of Singapore to cede the rest of the island, along with the southern coast where they had established a thriving trading post, to them. A treaty was signed in that year to seal this agreement.

The signing of this treaty, like other very important public ceremonies then, was probably carried out in the Governor's Residence on Fort Canning.

→ 9

Raffles House, Raffles Terrace

This is the site on which Sir Stamford Raffles built his bungalow for the beautiful view it commanded. It was also the place of residence for a long line of governors. This site offers an excellent vantage point for the dome of the Old Supreme Court and other well-known landmarks in the civic district.

Fort Canning Hill became an important communication center after the British established a port here in 1819. The first communication facility built on the hill was a flagstaff. This was followed in the 19th century by a time ball, a lighthouse, and a telegraph office.

Learn more about the uses of these communication facilities by visiting the replicas at Raffles Terrace.

→ 10

Time Ball

You are looking at a replica of the original time ball that was previously erected on this site. Time balls were previously used to give the public a signal of the correct time.

Historically, the time ball at Fort Canning was raised at 12:55pm and dropped at exactly 1pm daily, according to standard British practice. This helped businesses, government offices, and residents in the downtown area set their clocks and other time-keeping devices to a common time.

→ 11

Heritage Tree – Flame of the Forest (*Delonix regia*)

This is another heritage tree that you can see in Fort Canning. It has a spreading canopy with fine leaves. The beautiful scarlet flowers, when in bloom, may cover the entire crown and can last for weeks on the tree. The trunk of a mature tree like this is gnarled near the base. Its fruits, which are long pods, appear like swords hanging from the branches.

→ 12

Lighthouse

The lighthouse you see here is a small replica of the original that used to stand on Fort Canning Hill. The lighthouse at Fort Canning was one of Singapore's most prominent landmarks for ships



entering the harbour. The total elevation of 60m (made possible by the combined height of the hill and lighthouse) made the lighthouse visible 30km away.

In the 1950s, the lighthouse was overshadowed by tall buildings and was eventually closed.

→ 13

Broad-leaved Fig or Elephant Ear Fig Tree (*Ficus auriculata*)

This tree, which is native to India, South China and Indochina, has rounded leaves, with young shoots of intense mahogany colour. Its pear-shaped fruits turn reddish-brown when ripe and are often used in making jams.

Figs have an interesting co-dependence with wasps. The fruits are pollinated by wasps; the latter squeeze their way into the fruit to lay eggs. The fruit in turn provides food for the larvae of the wasps.

→ 14

Flagstaff

This flagstaff is a replica of the original that used to stand on Fort Canning Hill.

The flagstaff provided pertinent information on the arrival, identity, location, and status of ships entering Singapore harbour.

The first Fort Canning flagstaff was already standing in 1825. In addition to this flagstaff, another stood on Mt Faber.

The original wooden flagstaff on this hill was later replaced by a steel structure, which was removed by the Japanese about 1943 for unknown reasons during their occupation of Singapore.

The British erected another flagstaff on the hill after World War II, but it was only used for flying a British flag. This last flagstaff was removed when the microwave tower was built.

A Guide to Singapore's Colonial History Walking Trail at Fort Canning Park



→ 15

Tree appreciation

As you stroll along this path that meanders along the perimeters of the northern part of the reservoir, take a few moments to observe the flora and fauna here. You can find trees like the "hairy" Malayan Banyan (*Ficus microcarpa*), "thorny" Kapok or White Silk Cotton Tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) and tall Terap (*Artocarpus elasticus*) in this area.

Look out too for the Madras Thorn (*Pithecellobium dulce*), another heritage tree in this park. This tree, which is native to Central America, has a bushy crown with twigs bearing small prickly thorns. Its seeds, which are rose-red in colour, are covered with a thick white pulp. Birds feed on the pulp and help to disperse the seeds.

→ 16

Fort Canning Service Reservoir

This service reservoir was constructed in 1926 on the former site of a large artillery barracks and parade ground to supplement water supply in the vicinity.

Before this reservoir was built, a spring gushing from the southwest side of this hill served as an important source of water for centuries.

→ 17

Fort Gate and remnants of Fort Wall

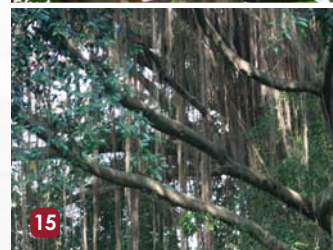
You are now passing through a remnant of the fortress that once occupied Fort Canning Hill from 1861 to 1926. The fort served two purposes - to protect Singapore from attack by sea, and to give Singapore's European population a refuge in the event of local disturbances.

The fort wall that you now see is a fragment of the strong wall that surrounded the summit of this hill. The low, thick wall was meant to withstand artillery bombardment. A moat, which had completely disappeared, used to run around this wall.

→ 18

Old gunpowder magazine

An old gunpowder magazine, 30m long and 10m wide, used to lie beneath the ground near this spot. It was subsequently converted into a shooting range for target practice.



→ 19

The Legends Fort Canning Park and Hotel Fort Canning

Built by the British in the 1920s, this building was headquarters for the Far East Command and the office of Lt-General Percival.

This building has been beautifully restored and now stands as The Legends Fort Canning Park, a town club, and Hotel Fort Canning, a boutique hotel that is currently under construction.

→ 20

Canning Walk

Canning Walk lies a short distance away. It is interesting to know that Fort Canning was named after Lord Canning who served as the last Governor General of India under the old English East India Company. He also became the First Viceroy under the new colonial system.

→ 21

Battle Box

Visit the Battle Box to get an insight of the functioning of an underground command centre. The Battle Box, constructed in 1936, was to be used in the event of war as a nerve centre for British military operations in South East Asia. Situated 9 meters beneath Fort Canning Hill, it was the site where Lt-General Percival, General Officer Commanding, Malaya Command, made the fateful decision to surrender Singapore to the Japanese, on 15 Feb 1942.

Go on a guided tour inside the bunker and experience the re-enactment of important events, in particular the last few hours before the historic surrender.

→ 22

The Sally Port

The Sally Port (a small door leading in and out of the fort) you see here was one of three at Fort Canning. The other two were supposed to be located on the south side near Hill Street. These two other Sally Ports have, however, disappeared.

A Guide to Singapore's Colonial History Walking Trail at Fort Canning Park



→ 23

Paintings of 19th Century landscape

As you walk through the Fort Canning Centre, stop at the foyer to view the paintings depicting 19th Century landscape.

As you look at these paintings, visualise the myriad of activities that must have taken place both on Fort Canning and at the bottom of this hill during that era – soldiers standing guard at the fort looking down at the town below, coolies hurrying to their destinations carrying cargo on their backs, locals going about their daily business, and a bustling scene by the Singapore River with Malay, Indian and Chinese locals and traders actively engaging in trade.

→ 24

First Christian cemetery

You are now at the site of Singapore's first Christian cemetery. This burial ground was used from 1822 to 1865.

George Coleman, an influential figure in the development of Singapore's infrastructure, was the person who oversaw the works at this cemetery.

An architect by profession, Coleman was Singapore's first architect and Raffles' consultant on the first Town Plan. He also assumed the role of Superintendent of Public Works in 1833. Coleman also designed several buildings including

the nearby Armenian Church and a private house which (after modification) stands today as Singapore's Parliament House. He died in Singapore in 1844 and was buried at Fort Canning.

Most of the gravestones had become very dilapidated and were removed in the 1970s. You can still see some headstones along the boundary walls (including Coleman's), as well as old tombstones that were moved here from another cemetery.

Here, you can also find the headstone belonging to the late Dr Jose D'Almeida, another influential figure in Singapore's trading history. When he died in 1850, his mercantile firm Jose D'Almeida & Sons was the biggest and most important in Singapore.

The two Gothic gates to the cemetery were designed by Captain Charles Edward Faber, a Superintending Engineer.

→ 25

Memorial to James Brooke Napier

This gothic structure was built in memory of the infant son of William Napier and Maria Frances Napier, the widow of George Coleman the architect.

The memorial, the largest erected in Government Hill cemetery, reflects the status of the boy's father, who became Singapore's first Law Agent in 1833.



→ 26

Cupolas

These cupolas, designed by Coleman himself, are two dome-shaped shelters most probably meant as places for rest and contemplation on the hill.

→ 27

Spice Garden

Make a small detour to visit the Spice Garden, a small replica of the original garden Raffles established in 1822 on Government Hill as the first experimental and botanical garden in Singapore.

At that time, spices were as valuable as gold among the English, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese. There was a fight for control over the sources and routes to the Spice Islands of Southeast Asia and India. In response to this fervor, the garden at Fort Canning was planted mainly with nutmeg, clove and other plants of economic value.

Do look out for these spices as you tour the Spice Garden.

→ 28

Stamford Green – 19th Century gateway to Fort Canning Park

You are now standing at the Eastern Gateway to Fort Canning Park. This is the last destination point for this walking trail.

As you walk around Stamford Green, follow the sequence of interpretative signboards that offer interesting information about landmarks in this area. Also, read more about the Old Malay Wall of Singapura that used to be near this site.

We hope you have enjoyed your walk. For another slice of Singapore's history, embark on the Singapore's Ancient History Trail at Fort Canning.

